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SENSITIVE

AF/SA D. MOZENA, B. NEULING
AFR/SA P. FLEURET, L. PIERSON, M. COPSON
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE,
D. TEITELBAUM
PRETORIA FOR T. TRENKLE

E. O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SACC AND IDASA READY TO LAUNCH ZIMBABWE ELECTION
OBSERVATION

1. (SBU) One day after the the Government of Zimbabwe's (GOZ) announcement of March 31 as the date for general Parliamentary elections, a group consisting of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA) quietly traveled to Harare to finalize plans for election monitoring. The consortium, which is operating with USAID funds, is headed by Reverend Molefe Tsele, Secretary General of SACC, and Paul Graham, Executive Director of IDASA. Other South African members include the Catholic Bishops Conference (CBC), the Center for Policy Studies (CPS), and the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR).

2. (SBU) In meeting with the Ambassador and USAID staff on February 3rd, the group laid out a comprehensive plan for election monitoring, including:

A. (SBU) Five different small delegations quietly coming to Zimbabwe over the next four weeks for relatively short periods (3-4 days each) to assess the overall electoral environment. These groups will look at specific sub-sectors of society including, civil society, the churches, gender organizations and political parties. As a result of the recent expulsion of the Congress of South African Trade Unions, a group of non-South African but regional labor organizations may also visit under the auspices of the SACC/IDASA consortium.

B. (SBU) Four medium-term monitors will plan to arrive quietly at the end of February or early March. They will stay through the election and travel around the country. These monitors will be election specialists from South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria who have worked in numerous elections around Africa.

C. (SBU) Fifty poll watchers will arrive four to five days before the elections, consisting of people from all over the region. The hope is that the SACC and IDASA consortium will receive official accreditation, but if not, they will consider "donating" the poll watchers to another group that does receive accreditation or, alternatively, bringing them into Zimbabwe quietly.

3. (SBU) There remains a great deal of uncertainty regarding how the GOZ will handle election observation teams as well as how the official SADC election observers will be constituted. Reverend Tsele and Mr. Graham indicated that they

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will continue to explore the process for official accreditation, but remain flexible to adapt to the evolving situation. The overall goal of the group will remain to bring a broad cross-section of civil society groups from the region into Zimbabwe to objectively observe the election environment and inform the ultimate assessment of whether the elections are free and fair.

14. (SBU) The group recognized that the elections will not solve Zimbabwe's fundamental constitutional problems of excessive, unchecked executive power exercised by Robert Mugabe. They, nonetheless, feel that their work has begun to generate increased regional civil society interest in Zimbabwe that will extend beyond the March 31 election. Hopefully, these regional groups can continue to exert pressure on SADC governments to push for democratic change in Zimbabwe, but, to date, there has been no evidence that SADC governments are willing to press the GOZ to mend its ways.

15. (SBU) This project is being funded by a USD 250,000 grant from USAID, using a combination of funds from the RCSA and the bilateral mission in Zimbabwe.

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